



U.S. Department
of Transportation
**National Highway
Traffic Safety
Administration**



DOT HS 810 760

April 2007

Parent-Taught Driver Education in Texas: A Comparative Evaluation

1. Report No. DOT HS 810 760	2. Government Accession No.	3. Recipient's Catalog No.	
4. Title and Subtitle Parent-Taught Driver Education in Texas: A Comparative Evaluation		5. Report Date April 2007	
		6. Performing Organization Code	
7. Author(s) V. J. Pezoldt, K. N. Womack, and D. E. Morris		8. Performing Organization Report No.	
9. Performing Organization Name and Address Texas Transportation Institute The Texas A&M University System College Station, Texas 77843-3135		10. Work Unit No. (TRAIS)	
		11. Contract or Grant No. DTNH22-02-D-85121	
12. Sponsoring Agency Name and Address National Highway Traffic Safety Administration U.S. Department of Transportation 400 Seventh Street SW. Washington, DC 20590		13. Type of Report and Period Covered Final Research Report	
		14. Sponsoring Agency Code	
15. Supplementary Notes This project (Task Order 2 under DTNH22-02-D-85121) was conducted by the Texas Transportation Institute under a subcontract with the University of North Carolina Highway Safety Research Center.			
16. Abstract An evaluation of the Parent-Taught Driver Education (PTDE) program in Texas was conducted using three different research techniques: (1) focus groups with driver education instructors, teen drivers, and their parents; (2) a statewide mail survey of young drivers; and (3) an analysis of Texas driver records. <u>Differences in Age at Licensing</u> Prior to implementation of the Texas graduated driver licensing (GDL) program in 2002, the PTDE program does not appear to have encouraged earlier licensing, and may have delayed obtaining an instructional permit for a portion of the PT students. Since implementation of the GDL, PT students obtain their instruction permits earlier than commercial/public school driver education students, suggesting that PT novice drivers are subject to the opportunity for increased exposure to the risks of driving. <u>Differences in Attitudes, Knowledge, and Skills of Novice Drivers</u> Driver education (DE) students and their parents generally agree that the PTDE program offers advantages over commercial and public school modes of DE delivery in terms of cost, comfort, and individualized personal attention to the student. Professional DE instructors believe the negative aspects of the PTDE program outweigh any perceived benefits, due largely to a lack of training, knowledge, and teaching skills on the part of parent-teachers. As measured by state-administered tests, PT students demonstrate poorer driving knowledge early in the training and licensing process and poorer driving skills at the end of formal driver education. Although only a small proportion of DE students fail to pass either the test required to obtain an instructional permit or the optional in-vehicle road test on the first attempt, significantly more PT drivers require multiple attempts to pass either test. <u>Differences in Driving Errors, Traffic Offenses and Crash Involvement</u> Self-reports by young drivers reveal no, or at most very small, differences related to type of DE with regard to driving knowledge and skills, driver errors, traffic convictions, and crashes among drivers subject to the GDL program. Driver records, however, both before and after implementation of the GDL, indicate PT novice drivers committed more traffic offenses and were in more crashes than were commercial or public school-trained drivers. Since implementation of the GDL, traffic convictions and crashes are substantially fewer for all novice drivers. Differences that exist are smaller and favor PT drivers during the period of most supervision (i.e., instructional permit phase of licensing). However, during the period when requirements for adult supervision are reduced (provisional license), and after supervisory and other GDL restrictions are removed (full licensure), PT drivers again experience proportionally more total traffic convictions and more, and more serious, crashes than drivers trained under commercial/public school DE programs.			
17. Key Words Novice drivers, driver education, parent-taught driver education, evaluation		18. Distribution Statement No restrictions. This document is available to the public through NTIS: National Technical Information Service 5285 Port Royal Road Springfield, Virginia 22161	
19. Security Classif.(of this report) Unclassified	20. Security Classif.(of this page) Unclassified	21. No. of Pages	22. Price

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Background

The important role and responsibility of parents in the education and training of young novice drivers has long been recognized. With the rise of graduated driver license programs and the decline of public school-based driver education in recent years, parents' roles have become even more essential. This report documents an assessment of one approach to involving parents directly in the education and training of new teenaged drivers, with particular emphasis on how it compares on outcome measures with traditional models of driver education.

Since 1967, teenagers in Texas have been permitted to obtain a driver's license at age 16 (or even younger if they could demonstrate a "hardship" need) only if they successfully complete an approved public school or commercial driver's school education course. Prior to 1997 this training requirement could be met solely if it was provided by schools and instructors certified by the Texas Education Agency (TEA).

In April 1997 the Texas Department of Public Safety (DPS) implemented rules, based on legislation passed in 1995, that provided for parent or guardian-taught novice driver training that meets all of the driver training requirements necessary for licensing between age 16 and 18. As currently constituted, the parent-taught driver education program in Texas essentially grants to parents the same role, rights, privileges, and responsibilities as were formerly granted only to State-licensed and approved novice driver instructors and driver education programs.

Goal and Approach

The primary goal of the present evaluation is determination of the impact, if any, of the Texas Parent-Taught Driver Education (PTDE) program on the education and training of young novice drivers and on the safety of novice drivers on Texas streets and highways. Information and data pertinent to these issues has been developed through focus groups conducted with driver education (DE) instructors, students and parents of DE students; a statewide mail survey of young drivers; and analysis of Texas driver records. Analysis of the information generated by this approach attempts to answer two basic questions about the parent-taught program relative to commercial driving school and public school based DE:

- Are there discernible differences in the attitudes, knowledge, and skills of novice drivers exposed to the three core driving instruction options available in Texas?
- Do parent-taught teenage drivers in Texas differ from those who complete either school-based or commercial driving school training as measured by post-licensing crash involvement and traffic offense convictions?

Although various DE stakeholder groups (e.g., educators, researchers, parents of novice drivers and young drivers themselves) often disagree about what the overriding objective of novice driver education is or should be, debate continues about the appropriate measures for assessing DE's success. The two most frequently cited goals for DE are:

- To impart knowledge of the rules of the road, the basic skills involved in vehicle operation, and instill and reinforce attitudes consistent with safe driving.
- To produce safe drivers, e.g., drivers with measurably lower crash rates.

This evaluation is comparative in nature and does not purport to assess the absolute extent to which the three modes of DE delivery in Texas meet either of the two goals above. Nor does it attempt to evaluate specific DE courses, course providers or instructors/teachers. Rather, the evaluation was conducted at a more global, macro level to determine if the parent-taught program, as a State policy, has contributed in any negative way to the training and licensing of young, novice drivers in Texas. In short, this study investigated whether the PTDE program performs less well than either of the two more traditional DE delivery options.

Results

Based on the analysis of information derived from nine focus groups, the responses of approximately 500 young drivers to a statewide survey, and analysis of more than 1.4 million Texas driver records, there is evidence to suggest that the parent-taught driver education program has a negative influence on the overall safety of novice drivers in Texas, especially in terms of young driver crash involvement.

Undoubtedly, many parents who serve as their teens' sole driving instructor under the program are highly motivated to do well and succeed in producing novice drivers who are at least as prepared to drive as many teens who take a traditional driver education course and who have a novice driving record at least the equal of graduates of commercial or public school DE courses. Many other parents are highly motivated to be their child's primary driving instructor, have the best interests of their children at heart, but simply are not equipped with the requisite aptitudes, attitudes, and experience to do so successfully. Still other parents who opt to participate in the program are neither appropriately equipped nor motivated.

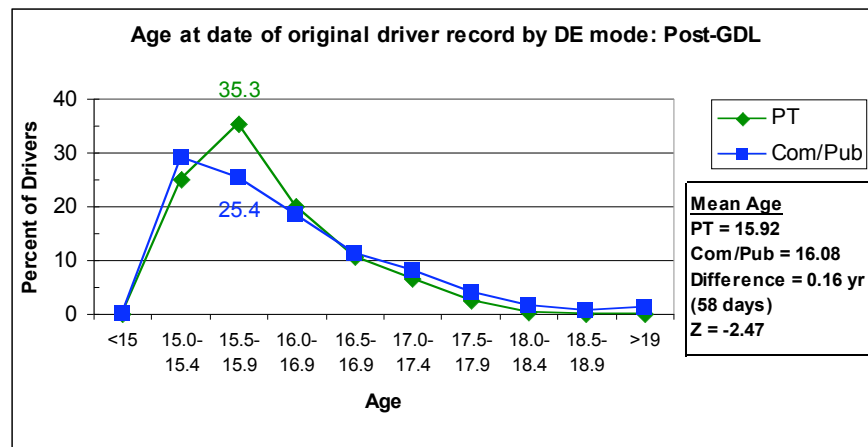
Specific Conclusions

Differences between the parent-taught program and Texas Education Agency-approved public and commercial driving school courses led to eleven conclusions in three general areas: (1) differences in age at licensing, (2) differences in attitudes, knowledge and skills of novice drivers, and (3) differences in driving errors, traffic offenses and crash involvement.

Differences in age at licensing

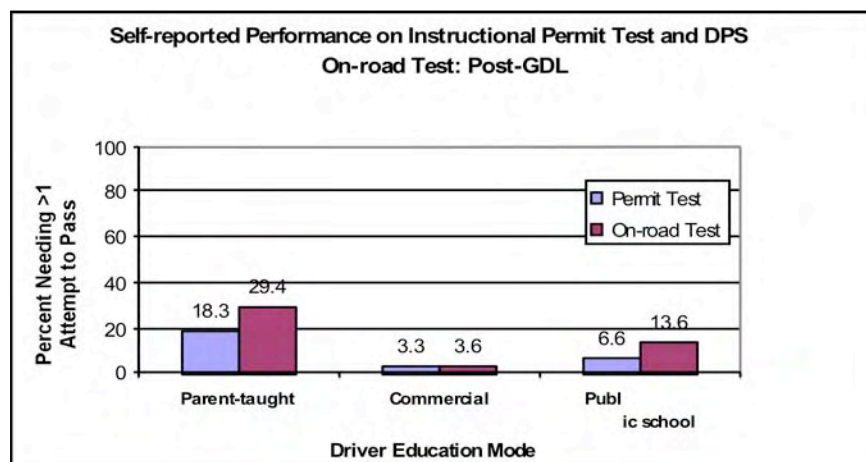
- *Taken as a whole, the data suggests that prior to the Texas GDL program, the parent-taught program does not appear to have encouraged earlier licensing and, indeed, may have delayed obtaining an instructional permit for a portion of parent-taught (PT) students.*
- *Since the implementation of the GDL, PT students are obtaining at least their first licenses (instructional permits) somewhat younger than commercial/public school DE students do, suggesting that parent-taught novice drivers are subject to the opportunity for increased exposure to the risks of driving, albeit during the period of most supervision. As indicated in the figure below, this is evidenced by the significantly younger average age at which PT novice drivers establish a driver record and the larger proportion of PT novice drivers establishing a driver record as 15.5-15.9 year-olds relative to commercial and public school trained drivers.*

Establishment of a driver record typically coincides with the issuance of an instructional permit. Confirmation of greater exposure would require data not available to the present evaluation, that is, differences in actual miles driven as a function of DE type.



Differences in attitudes, knowledge and skills of novice drivers

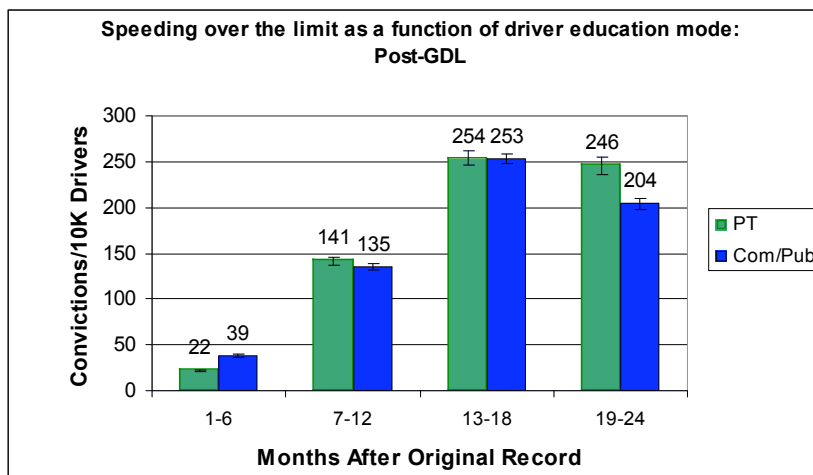
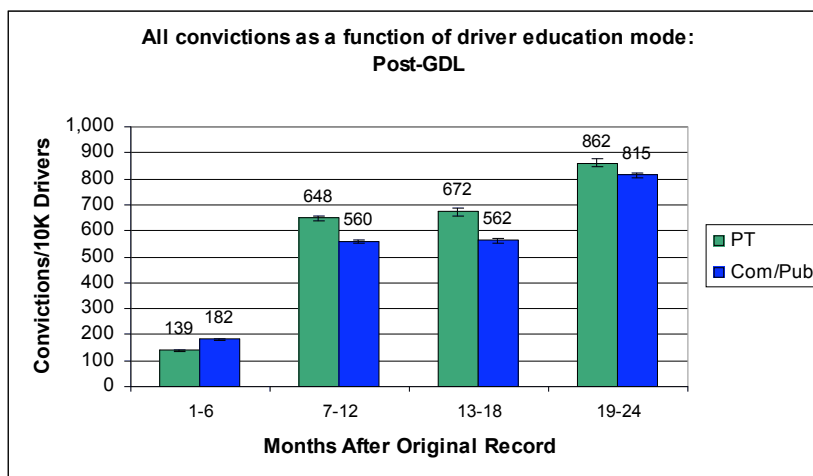
- *Driver education students and their parents agree that the parent-taught DE program offers advantages over commercial and public school modes of DE delivery in terms of cost, comfort and individualized personal attention to the student. Professional DE instructors believe the negative aspects of the parent-taught program outweigh any perceived benefits, due largely to a lack of training, knowledge and teaching skills on the part of parent-teachers.*
- *Very few differences in driving knowledge and skills among the three DE course delivery modes are discernible from self-reports of specific driving-related knowledge and skills.*
- *As measured by State-administered tests (see figure below), however, parent-taught students demonstrate poorer driving knowledge early in the training and licensing process and poorer driving skills at the end of formal driver education. Although only a small proportion of DE students fail to pass either the test required to obtain an instructional*



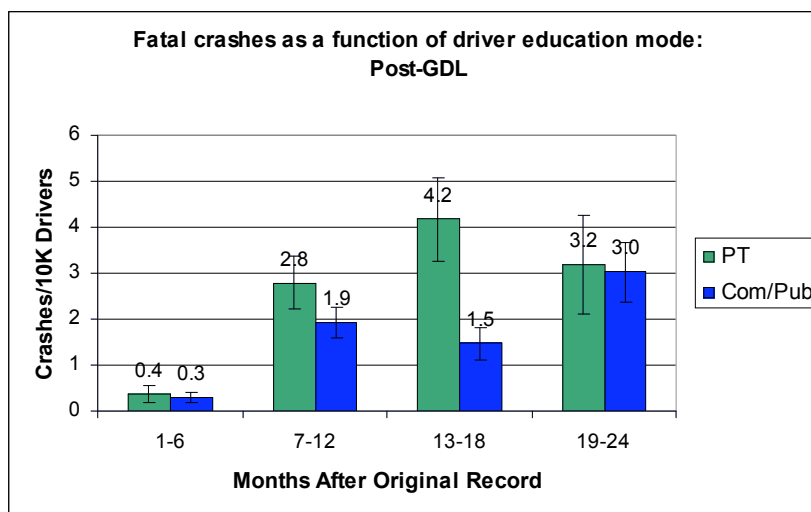
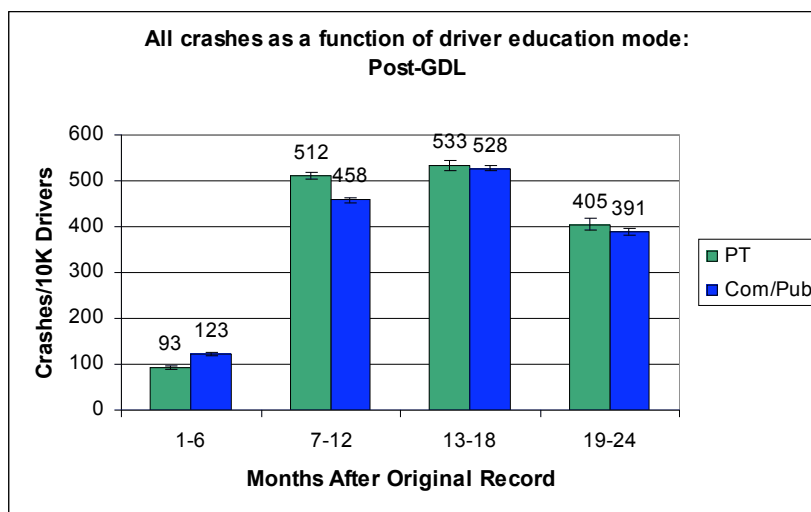
permit or the optional in-vehicle road test on the first attempt, significantly more PT drivers require multiple attempts to pass.

Differences in driving errors, traffic offenses and crash involvement

- Based on self-reports, the incidence of driving errors among young drivers subject to the GDL does not differ as a function of type of DE.
- Based on driver records, PT novice drivers were convicted of more traffic offenses than commercial or public school-trained drivers before implementation of the GDL program, especially in the first year of driving.
- Since implementation of the GDL, convictions for traffic offenses are substantially fewer for all novice drivers. Differences that do exist are generally smaller and favor PT drivers during the period of most supervision, i.e., the instructional permit phase of licensing. During the period when, for most young drivers, requirements for adult supervision are reduced (provisional license) and after supervisory and other GDL restrictions are removed (full licensure), PT drivers again experience proportionally more total traffic convictions than drivers trained under commercial/public school DE programs. The figures below show all convictions and speeding convictions per ten thousand drivers by DE type.



- *Based on self-reports of novice drivers subject to the GDL, the incidence of crashes involving parent-taught drivers is not greater than that reported by commercial or public-school-trained novice drivers.*
- *Based on crashes reported in Texas driver records, before implementation of the Texas GDL proportionally more and more serious crashes were experienced by parent-taught novice drivers over the first 18 months of driving experience. Through the next 18 months of driving most differences disappeared. However, possible injury crashes occurred with greater frequency among commercial or public-school-trained drivers and fatal crashes occurred significantly more often among PT drivers in the first half of the third year of driving experience.*
- *Since implementation of the GDL, crashes are substantially fewer for all novice drivers. Differences that do exist generally are small and favor PT drivers during the period of most supervision, the instructional permit phase of licensing. During the period when requirements for adult supervision are reduced (provisional license) and after supervisory and other GDL restrictions are removed (full licensure), PT drivers experience proportionally more crashes and more serious crashes than drivers trained under commercial/public school DE programs. All crashes and fatal crashes per 10,000 drivers by DE type are illustrated below.*



Recommendations for Texas Driver Education

Four recommendations are offered that may at least incrementally improve the parent-taught program if Texas continues the program in its current form.

- *Improve the criteria for parental participation in the parent-taught driver education program.*

A more demanding parental driver record may be appropriate with regard to traffic convictions and crash involvement in order to qualify for the parent-teacher position. As a minimum, consideration should be given to disqualifying parents from participating in the PT program if sufficient points have been assessed and recorded on their driving record under the Texas Driver Responsibility Program to subject them to driver license surcharges.

- *Require at least some minimum training and/or testing for parents who want to teach their children to drive under the program.*

The addition of a qualifying examination and/or a short training program developed specifically for the parent-taught program could help assure at least a minimum degree of mastery of the necessary subject matter for teaching teens to drive. Even a requirement for the parent-teacher to pass the current instructional permit test and successfully complete an approved defensive driving course could motivate parents to upgrade their knowledge of current laws, increase their awareness of traffic issues and raise their level of consciousness with regard to driving safety.

- *Improve DPS monitoring of and accountability for the activities of the PT program.*

Currently, parents are required to complete a Parental Driver Education Affidavit (DL-90A) and may be required to present a Classroom Instruction Record (DL-91A) and a Behind the Wheel Record Log (DL-91B). While it is not obvious precisely how improvements might be implemented, it is apparent that the current procedures for assuring parents are in fact meeting their responsibilities under the parent-taught program are not sufficient.

- *Reinstitute a requirement for an on-road driving assessment before granting a provisional and/or unrestricted license to novices under 18.*

Over the past several Texas legislative sessions, various bills have been introduced that would reinstitute the requirement for a road test for drivers licensed before they are 18 years old. Some would have required a road test only for young license applicants who completed a PTDE course, while others required all applicants to pass a road test without regard to the type of driver education completed. To date, all such bills have failed. While requiring all applicants to pass a road test has the obvious advantage of appearing to be more equitable, there is a rational counterargument to the proposition that requiring only parent-taught students to take a road test would be discriminatory. The original purpose of a road test as a prerequisite to licensure was to provide “a demonstration of the applicant's ability to exercise ordinary and reasonable control in the operation of a motor vehicle of the type that the applicant will be licensed to operate.”¹ Driving instructors certified or licensed by the State by virtue of their education, training, and experience clearly can be characterized as acting as agents of the State when they certify that their students have demonstrated the ability to exercise ordinary and reasonable control in the operation of a motor vehicle. It is

¹ Chapter 521, Section 161 of the Texas Transportation Code

reasonable to posit that among the knowledge and skills obtained through training is the ability to determine an applicant's ability to control a motor vehicle to a degree acceptable for licensing. Delegating this responsibility to parents without any training or other demonstration that they are capable of making that determination is neither reasonable nor prudent.

Neither the conclusions indicating a negative impact of the parent-taught program on young driver crash involvement nor the recommendations above diminish the desirability, indeed critical importance, of extensive and intensive parental involvement in the learning process for young novice drivers, especially in providing structured, supervised driving practice. The conclusions and recommendations here are directed specifically to the condition under which parents often become the only source of novice driver education and training.